United Nations E/CN.6/2006/NGO/10

Economic and Social Council

Distr.: General
23 January 2006

Original: English

Commission on the Status of Women
Fiftieth session
27 February-10 March 2006
Item 3 (c) (i) of the provisional agenda*
Follow-up to the Fourth World Conference on Women and to the special session of the General Assembly entitled "Women 2000: gender equality, development and peace for the twenty-first century": implementation of strategic objectives and action in critical areas of concern and further actions and initiatives: enhanced participation of women in development: an enabling environment for achieving gender equality and the advancement of women, taking into account, inter alia, the fields of education, health and work

Statement submitted by Congregations of St. Joseph, International Alliance of Women, Coalition Against Trafficking in Women, Congregation of Our Lady of Charity of the Good Shepherd, Grail, International Council of Jewish Women, International Federation of Women in Legal Careers, International Federation of Women Lawyers, International Presentation Association of the Sisters of the Presentation, Mouvement pour l'abolition de la prostitution et de la pornographie et de toutes formes de violences sexuelles et discriminations sexistes, School Sisters of Notre Dame and UNANIMA International, non-governmental organizations in consultative status with the Economic and Social Council

The Secretary-General has received the following statement, which is being circulated in accordance with paragraphs 36 and 37 of Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31 of 25 July 1996.

* E/CN.6/2006/1.

06-21840 (E) 070206

Statement

We, NGOs working toward the realization of gender equality, affirm the need for full participation of women in development. To attain this goal, we believe it is critical to recognize that sexual violence and exploitation are a very significant barrier to achieving gender equality and development.

In particular, male violence against women and girls is antithetical to the establishment of an enabling environment for achieving gender equality. One of the most severe, devastating, and escalating practices of gender-based violence is the commercial sexual exploitation of women and girls, including prostitution, sex trafficking, the Internet bride industry, pornography, and sex tourism. The advancement of women in the fields of education, health and work is severely hindered by the proliferation of trafficking and commercial sexual exploitation. Working toward the elimination of these forms of violence against women is essential to giving women equal opportunity to participate in development.

The impact of trafficking and prostitution on the advancement of women

Reports of UNICEF indicate that as many as half of trafficking victims are children. Girls are the majority of the approximately one million children who enter the sex industry each year. Their education is disrupted when they are trafficked into prostitution and forced early marriages. Without access to school, girls fail to develop their potential, often perpetuating their sexual exploitation into adulthood. Without the knowledge and training available to other youth, prostituted women and girls have limited ability to benefit from and contribute to their community's development.

The negative impact of sex trafficking on the health and human rights of women around the world is enormous. Sexual violence is one of the leading factors of the spread of HIV/AIDS among women and girls. UNAIDS, UNFPA, and UNIFEM have identified gender inequality as the core cause of the rapid spread of HIV/AIDS among women and girls, citing their inability to exercise control over their bodies and their lives. Further, a survey of 854 people in prostitution in nine countries (Canada, Colombia, Germany, Mexico, South Africa, Thailand, Turkey, United States, and Zambia) revealed that 71% experienced physical assaults in prostitution, and 62% reported rapes in prostitution. *See* Melissa Farley, *Prostitution in nine countries: Update on violence and posttraumatic stress disorder* (2003). Trafficked and prostituted women and girls have little redress against the abuse, violence, harassment and debasement to which they are subjected. Victims of prostitution often suffer severe health consequences ranging from injuries inflicted by beatings, rapes, and unwanted sex; psychological devastation, including trauma, depression, and suicide; HIV/AIDS and other sexually transmitted diseases; and alcohol and drug abuse induced by pimps or by women's attempts to self-medicate. Women and girls suffering from these severe and often long-term health problems are hindered in attaining and advancing their human rights.

Traffickers and pimps exploit women and girls seeking to improve their lives through employment by reducing them to commodities to be bought and sold. Traffickers, pimps, and buyers degrade their humanity. Men purchase the right to insult, slap, and rape women and girls. These acts, which include forms of sexual violence that women's and human rights groups have long sought to eliminate from women's beds, homes, workplaces and streets, are part of the "job" in the sex industry. Over the past decade, economic policies often have led to prioritizing profit at the expense of human rights and gender equality. Rather than recognizing women's skills and contributions to society, governments have adopted development policies effectively normalizing and, in some places, even legalizing sexual violence and exploitation such as prostitution and pornography. Legal legitimatization of prostitution gives men moral and social permission to practice the prostitution of women and girls, which in turn encourages an increase in the demand that fuels sex trafficking. As the demand for prostituted sex increases, so does the risk of sexual exploitation for women and girls seeking opportunities for advancement through work.

Recommendations

In order to create an enabling environment for women and girls and to advance gender equality, governments and civil society must take action to eradicate violence against women, particularly sexual violence and exploitation in the sex industry. We urge policy and action in the following areas:

- Implementation of preventative measures such as public education campaigns which describe the risks of trafficking, prostitution, and related forms of sexual exploitation to potential victims, and which challenge the attitudes and practices of potential perpetrators that result in sexual exploitation;

- Educational curricula in the lower grades that raise awareness about the harm of gender stereotypes and sexual objectification of women and girls and that promote gender inequality in relationships;

- Elimination by governments of structural factors that push women into trafficking and commercial sexual exploitation such as poverty, systematic violence against women, gender discrimination, and other forms of discrimination such as racism;

- Increased support and services for survivors of trafficking and prostitution;

- Promotion of effective laws against trafficking, prostitution, and related forms of sexual exploitation, including provisions criminalizing the demand for trafficking and prostitution;

- Development of training programs for government bodies such as law enforcement to hold perpetrators, including traffickers, pimps, and buyers, accountable rather than criminalizing victims;

- Strong and effective prosecution of perpetrators of violence against women, including buyers and sellers of women and girls in prostitution and related practices of sexual exploitation;

- Rejection of government policies promoting prostitution, whether through legalization or decriminalization of the sex industry;

- Ratification and implementation of the Convention for the Suppression of the Traffic in Persons and the Exploitation of the Prostitution of Others (the "1949 Convention"); the Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination Against Women ("CEDAW"); the Convention on the Rights of the Child; and the Convention Against Transnational Organized Crime and its Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons, Especially Women and Children.

Given the severe and often long-term effects of sex trafficking and prostitution on women's and girls' education, health and work, governments and civil society must implement policies recognizing that commercial sexual exploitation impedes women's attainment of gender equality and full participation in society. An environment which would enable women's equality and participation in development is one which identifies the harms of commercial sexual exploitation and works to eradicate it.